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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Radio Service

OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOMEMAKERS' CHAT WEDNESDAY, July 27, 1938

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

SUBJECT: "TIPS FOR FOOD SHOPPERS." Information from the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, United States Department of Agriculture. and the Consumers' Counsel, Agricultural Adjustment Administration.

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Once again our conversation turns to food supplies and prices--to the foods now on the market or soon coming to market. If you buy the groceries for the family, here are some forecasts to help you plan ahead and purchase food to best advantage.

And your pocketbook ought to do pretty well for the rest of the year for food costs in general will continue below last year's. Larger supplies of many foods are coming on the market and that should mean lower prices. You can expect to see more chickens and other poultry on the market, more butter, more sweet-potatoes, rice and wheat, more pears anddried prunes, more canned snap beans and peas. (If you're thrifty, these are items to remember when you're shopping from now on. They ought to be good buys.) Then, after the marketing year opens in October, many more hogs will probably be slaughtered-more pork for your fall and winter meals. Of course, not all foods are on the increase this year. To offset the larger supplies I've just mentioned, smaller amounts of apples, grapes, eggs, potatoes, almonds and walnuts will be coming in. And you may expect fewer cans of tomatoes, corn and fruit on the grocery shelves. But more frozen fruits and vegetables will be for sale this winter.

The only food that seems likely to hit high in price is eggs. So if you are having any difficulty stretching your pocketbook to feed the family, better not plan too many angel food cakes for some months to come.

Perhaps you remember that last summer meat prices kicked up their heels and went skyrocketing. Though the price of meat has gone up some recently, the forecasters say it won't go up this summer as it did last.

For awhile the forecasters predicted that we'd have many less potatoes this year than last. But they say now that the decrease won't be as much as they counted on, so potato prices will probably go down as they usually do at this time of year. August is the month when the price of potatoes is generally lowest in eastern markets while in the West September or October are the months when you can generally get the most potatoes for your money. It looks now as if we'd have almost as many potatoes this year as last--and that's a lot. So prices ought to be about the same as last year--and that was low. Of course, the late potato crop isn't harvested yet. And if growing conditions should be unfavorable during the rest of the season, potato supplies might be smaller and prices higher in the fall

As I said, the price of eggs is on the up and up. It will be highest in November or December, and it will be above what you were paying for eggs last year. Why the rise? Several reasons. The poultry population was cut down heavily in '36 and early '37 and we had a very small hatch in '37. So on July first of this year

farm flocks were down to a record low in numbers and storage holdings were also at a record low. That's why this fall and early winter there will be fewer fresh eggs than last year.

In spite of high egg prices, chickens will probably be fairly cheap this fall and winter. You see, during the first part of the year a good many more chickens were hatched than last year. And this year's crop of chickens--that almost sounds as if I were going into a song--this spring's chickens are the ones that will be going to market for the rest of the year, many of them selling right now as fryers or broilers. The July first count of poultry on farms showed an unusually large number of chicks and young chickens.

As for meat, though prices went up moderately in July, they are expected to continue lower than in '37. And lamb prices may go down --start the usual drop which comes when more grass-fed lambs go to market. Pork and better-grade beef prices generally advance during the summer months. You may be interested to know that about the middle of June prices of meat in retail markets reached a new high for 1938 but were still about 5 percent less than last year.

Here's a little August fruit news. After reaching their peak in July, watermelon shipments taper off and in August the season is about over. So better eat your watermelon while you may; watermelon time is a-flying. Ripeness is what mostly determines quality in melons. And the best way to test it is to plug the melon. Another test is to thump the melon. A dull hollow sound indicates that the melon is ripe, while a ringing sound indicates that it isn't quite mature yet. Of course, thumping doesn't show when the melon is over-ripe, or when it has white heart--a hard white streak running lengthwise through the fruit. The only way to detect these faults is to cut the melon and see for yourself. Large melons have more heart or flesh free from seed than small melons.

You remember that last year we had a great big apple crop--a bumper crop. The stores were still trying to get rid of last fall's apples early this summer. This year our apple trees will bear about a third fewer apples than they did last year. But the price of apples will probably be only slightly higher than the price of last season's apples. This is because people who will be buying apples this year average less money to spend for food than last year.

Almond and walnut crops last year were large, too. This year they will be much smaller but even so they will be about average in size.

Finally, about wheat, flour and bread. The wheat crop this year is likely to beat all previous records for size except the 1915 record, and flour prices may go down some more. Retail flour prices have gone down about a cent a pound since their peak a year ago. But bread prices have remained practically unchanged at the relatively high level reached last June. In a few cities bread prices have come down somewhat as a result of lower costs of flour and other ingredients. In late June, chainstore bakers in Milwaukee started a drop of 2 cents a pound for bread in that city. This may be the first in a series of bread-price drops all over the country--an interesting point to watch, by the way. At present there is a wide margin between the wholesale prices of ingredients and the average retail cost of bread--in other words, between what the bakers pay for their flour and other ingredients and what you pay for bread for the family at your grocery store.

This concludes our fortnightly tips for food-shoppers.

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